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Viewing cable 09ATHENS1623, SCENESETTER FOR ASD VERSHBOW'S VISIT TO GREECE

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09ATHENS1623	2009-11-12 17:08	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Athens

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AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR ASD VERSHBOW'S VISIT TO GREECE

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CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel V. Speckhard, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (C), (D)

¶1. (C) Welcome to Greece. Your visit is an important one and reinforces efforts by recent high-level USG visitors (SACEUR ADM Stavridis, COMNAVEUR ADM Fitzgerald, PM A/S Shapiro, and CNO ADM Roughead) to demonstrate to the Greeks that we are serious about our Alliance and about working with them on global challenges. Since his election October 4, PM (and FM) George Papandreou has focused his energies abroad, hoping for quick progress on tough challenges like the Aegean, Cyprus, and the Macedonia name issue. Yet Greece's dire economic situation will soon catch up to him, and limit his hand. U.S.-Greek military-to-military cooperation is good, particularly at the U.S. Naval Support Activity at Souda Bay on Crete, which plays a key role in supporting U.S. military operations in the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Greece is also among the largest purchasers of U.S. military equipment. At the same time, Greece's participation in NATO is politically sensitive, and it has provided only limited contributions to key theatres such as Afghanistan. While Greeks have affection for Americans in general owing to immigration links and the Marshall Plan, significant percentages have felt at deep odds with U.S. foreign policy. However, President Obama's election has created a new opening to improve and permanently alter Greek views of the U.S.

¶2. (C) Your participation in the High Level Consultative Committee (HLCC) and your bilateral meetings with MOD Venizelos and MFA officials can help move Greek positions on a range of important issues. I recommend that you encourage your interlocutors to:

-- live up to the commitment the previous government made to President Obama to enhance their Afghanistan contributions;

-- work vigorously to find a solution to the Macedonia name issue that would allow Macedonia to join NATO and the EU and strengthen stability in Greece's neighborhood.

-- continue to support Turkey's EU orientation;

-- seek to foster goodwill in the Aegean, despite passionately held views and frustrations;

-- keep an open mind and support us as we move forward on our Phased Adaptive Approach to European ballistic missile defense; and

-- continue their efforts and look for ways to expand cooperation on counter-piracy and non-proliferation.

Political Overview

¶3. (C) Since his election October 4, PM (and FM) George Papandreou has focused his energies abroad to a large extent, hoping for quick progress on tough challenges like the Aegean, Cyprus, and the Macedonia name issue. Yet Greece's dire economic situation will force him to spend more time on domestic issues in the

not-too-distant future. The EU Monetary Affairs Commissioner recently noted that Greece's budget deficit this year is set to be 12.7 percent of GDP (with an EU limit being 3 percent), criticized Greek economic data submitted to the Commission as "completely wrong," and stated that the challenges facing Greece are "high" and "a question of common concern for the whole euro area." Greece

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will eventually have to pay the Euro-zone piper, and Papandreou will have to make some extremely difficult - and politically unpopular - economic decisions at home to avoid EU sanctions and penalties. The budgetary restraints have already been reflected in the draft FY2010 defense budget, which contains some 500 million euros worth of cuts.

14. (C) New PM (and Foreign Minister) Papandreou has an American mother, has lived and studied in the U.S., and having been Foreign Minister under a previous PASOK administration, developed a good reputation in the international community as a thoughtful and constructive interlocutor. While he must use careful rhetoric domestically to avoid the "Amerikanaki" (little American) label by detractors, our recent engagements with him have been positive.

ISAF

15. (C) MOD Venizelos is feeling the heat both domestically and within NATO, and we should keep the pressure on. The prior government committed to President Obama to expand Greece's ISAF effort, by deploying its previously caveat-bound Kabul engineering battalion out to RC-West, standing up a 17-person OMLT in Jan/Feb 2010, and taking control of the Kabul airport in April 2010. Greek planners recently identified force protection concerns, which present both procurement and budgetary challenges. Venizelos recently told the Ambassador the deployment would cost 65 million euros which were not in the Greek budget. Additionally, the Ministry has requested from the U.S. at reduced cost, leasing, or grant 32 MRAP-type vehicles, 52 anti-IED ECM devices, and a host of other equipment including armored dump trucks and bulldozers. Compounding the issue is the fact that Greek participation in ISAF remains unpopular with the Greek population at large, and any casualties - particularly those that could be attributed to inadequate force protection measures - could result in extreme pressure on the government to remove its forces from ISAF. In an encouraging sign, the Minister did tell the Ambassador that Greece would contribute 3-4 million euros to the ANA Trust Fund and would keep medical assets, there for elections support, deployed with Germany in RC-North for the future.

16. (C) The new government is likely to decide on the RC-West deployment soon. They are keenly watching our review in Washington, and will be interested in your reassurance as to our future plans in Afghanistan. We stand to make progress on this issue if you can assure your interlocutors of continuing U.S. commitment, our expectation that Allies increase their efforts, and our willingness to either help them deploy to RC-West, or to work with them bilaterally and at NATO to develop an alternate deployment that would fill an important ISAF CJSOR need for which they are presently equipped and could deploy quickly.

Balkans

17. (C) PM Papandreou has launched an initiative calling for full integration of the Balkans into European institutions by 2014. He has reached out to his Macedonian counterpart, and the Greeks have consistently told us they are willing to compromise on the Macedonia name issue as long as the formula is consistent with the bipartisan agreement in Greece about how far they can go. Greek red lines include an insistence on "erga omnes" use internationally of a new name with a geographic modifier. This controversy remains emotionally and politically salient for many Greeks. We are pressing Greece to work to avoid a hard landing or "veto" of the opening of Macedonia's EU accession talks at the December 10 European Council meeting.

18. (SBU) In other parts of the Balkans, while Greece continues its non-recognition of Kosovo, it maintains two mechanized infantry battalions (roughly 600 soldiers) in NATO's KFOR, and is providing personnel and support to the EU's "Rule of Law Mission" there. We welcome Greece's ongoing efforts to urge Serbia to take a forward-looking approach to its future in the European and Euro-Atlantic community. In Bosnia, Greece participated in NATO's SFOR operation until its successful conclusion in December 2005. Greece maintains approximately 45 soldiers in the EU's follow-on "Althea" security and stability mission.

Turkey: EU Accession and Aegean Issues

19. (C) The Papandreou government continues its predecessor's support for the accession of Turkey to the EU, but has told us that they will not give a "blank check" to Turkey unless they see satisfactory progress on key bilateral issues and Cyprus. PM Papandreou told the Ambassador he hopes to make quick progress on improving Greek-Turkish relations, and while he would not compromise on sovereignty issues, would be willing to settle other differences with Turkey at the ICJ in The Hague. Papandreou is proud of his record of cooperation with Turkey during his tenure as Foreign Minister (1999-2004), and took a bold first step in his first days in office by traveling to Istanbul - ostensibly for a Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial conference - during which he met bilaterally with Turkish PM Erdogan. Erdogan reciprocated this month with a note to Papandreou, to which the PM has yet to reply. Turkish EU accession negotiator Egemen Bagis visited Athens on November 5, during which he met with PM Papandreou, Alternate FM Droutsas, and gave a speech at a prominent think tank.

110. (C) Greece and Turkey still differ on a host of Aegean issues, including air/seaspace demarcation, economic zones, demilitarization issues, flight safety requirements, and immigration. During the HLCC you will hear Greek complaints of unannounced Turkish military flights into the Athens Flight Information Region (FIR), both inside the Greeks' claimed 10 nautical mile airspace boundary (which the U.S. does not recognize, because of the disparity with their six nautical mile territorial sea claim), as well as within the internationally recognized six nautical mile limits. To the chagrin of Turkey, Greece "tags" as hostile unannounced Turkish military flights in the Athens FIR, and Greek F-16s routinely intercept such Turkish aircraft. Armed, low-level Turkish overflights of the inhabited Greek islands of Agathonisi and Farmakonisi dramatically increased in 2009 compared to prior years, though the Greeks told us that the Turks suspended

these flights from September 7 until November 2. Both countries have in the past attempted to use NATO exercises to press claims or to make points. In your meetings, we recommend taking an overall strategic approach that emphasizes mutual respect, confidence building measures, and safety of flight with both countries, while encouraging the Greeks to be proactive in offering confidence building measures. Suggesting that they should stop labeling unannounced Turkish flights into the Athens FIR as hostile would be a good step, consistent with what NATO has been encouraging in the past.

Missile Defense

¶11. (C) Greek officials viewed the September recalibration of U.S. missile defense plans positively. Most media, though, portrayed the step as a concession to Russia. Press reports here have also speculated about Turkey's role in future missile defense plans, and intentions for the U.S. to sell Patriot missiles to Turkey. Government interlocutors have shown interest, as well. We are aware of ongoing U.S. talks with Turkey over its potential role in the PAA, and their sensitivity. Your meetings here, though, can do much to help the Greek government understand where southeastern Europe and the Med fit into the PAA. We believe that our senior Greek interlocutors do understand the threat from Iran and the potentially important role Turkey can play. Proactive engagement can help us keep the Greek government informed and on our side, and help them help us as they manage their domestic politics and media environment.

Counter-Piracy and Non-Proliferation

¶12. (C) We share many views with the Greeks on piracy; this is an issue where we can maintain a robust and fruitful dialogue. Greece served as the flagship command of the EU's first ever naval operation, Atalanta, off of Somalia last year, has a frigate now in Atalanta's current rotation, and participated in NATO's Ocean Shield through its rotational contribution to NATO's Standing Naval Maritime Group 2. Senior Greek Navy officials have told us, though, they will draw down in the Gulf of Aden if Turkey does in order to maintain a "balance" in the Aegean. Greece is no longer in Ocean Shield, as SNMG-1 has taken over command of the operation. We would like to see a continued Greek presence in NATO counter-piracy efforts, given Greece's prominent role in international shipping.

¶13. (C) On non-proliferation, we have had good practical cooperation with Greek authorities and shipowners. In the last two years they have allowed several boardings that uncovered sanctioned materials on their way to North Korea and Iran. Bilateral negotiations have frozen regarding a formal Shipboarding Agreement in the Proliferation Security Initiative framework, yet non-proliferation remains an area for overall strong cooperation with the new Greek government.

Bilateral Defense Relations: Souda Bay and Procurement

¶14. (C) We have made a sustained high-level push over the past months with the MOD and MFA to get leaders to cut through the red tape and to provide the U.S. with written authorization to proceed with the construction of a badly needed new jet fuel pipeline and fuel storage tanks that would replace a decaying old pipeline that runs through an inhabited area, maintain high-capacity refueling capabilities and protect the environment at and around our Naval Support Activity at Souda Bay, Crete. Permission to execute the project has been stuck in the Greek bureaucracy for nearly seven years, and the MOD at present is not certain whether or not it needs approval from cautious MFA lawyers to grant this authorization. The Ambassador recently raised this issue with MOD Venizelos, who assured the Ambassador he was "ready to solve" this problem. Your follow up at the HLCC and bilaterally will be valuable; your message should be that we want to spend \$32 million on the Cretan economy to upgrade our strategic relationship, safeguard the environment, and keep Souda a key facility for Greece, the U.S., and NATO. Continued delay threatens the Congressional funding, and increases risk.

¶15. (C) Greece is a large purchaser of U.S. defense goods. We have over \$8 billion in FMS cases and there is potential for more than \$6 billion coming up for international competition over the next two years, though Greek budget difficulties may hamper that. MOD Venizelos complained to the Ambassador on November 4 about a problem with the defensive systems on the Peace Xenia III F-16s, and stated that U.S. companies need to take more responsibility. The ASPIS II defensive systems suite was programmed through direct commercial sale to go on the 60 Peace Xenia III aircraft. Due to stalled negotiations between the Greek MOD and Raytheon, none of the 60 PX-III aircraft have defensive systems installed. (Comment: This means that many of Greece's Aegean intercept sorties are being flown by aircraft with no/no defensive countermeasures. End comment.)

¶16. (C) More broadly, we need to reinforce the new Papandreou administration's effort to bring transparency and fair competition into their procurement processes. Greek national security as well as U.S. defense companies have suffered in the past when decisions were made based on political factors. In some instances, Greek readiness and interoperability have been degraded. The Ambassador has argued to interlocutors that U.S. companies will do well if the new government simply pursues what is good for the Greek taxpayer and Greece's own national security, as we believe U.S. defense products can stand on their own in a free market and fair competition.

Other Issues

¶17. (C) OTHER MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS: Greek contributions to
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other important initiatives are substantial and should not be overlooked. The U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force rely heavily on Naval Support Activity Souda Bay in Crete as a support hub for sea and air operations in the Eastern Mediterranean, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

(Comment: Although it is fine to thank them privately during meetings, Greek public sentiment is generally anti-NATO, and anti-American military, so the help Greece gives us at Souda Bay and with frequent transshipments of ammunition are subjects they would like to keep private avoiding any public acknowledgments.) Greece allows over 24,000 over-flights of U.S. military aircraft a year; participates in NATO's Operations Active Endeavour; the EU's counter-piracy mission off of Somalia Operation Atalanta; and the UN's Lebanon mission, UNIFIL.

¶18. (C) IMMIGRATION: You will hear about this from your interlocutors. Greece has become an entry point of choice for illegal immigrants into the European Union. The number of illegal migrants detained by Greek authorities has increased dramatically over the last two years, reaching 140,000 last year (in a country with a population of only about 11 million). The presence of these migrants - many of whom originated in conflict zones in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Middle East and entered Greece via Turkey - has become a major political issue. It also roils Greek-Turkish relations on occasion, with the Greeks leveling accusations that Turkey does not do enough to stop the outflow to Greece, and indeed, aids and abets the illegal immigrants. Greece is making a strong push for the European Union to take this issue on and to negotiate repatriation agreements with source countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. The EU's border security agency, Frontex, has its largest operation on Greek territory, which has caused irritation to Turkey at times.

¶19. (S) TERRORISM: You should also be aware that Greece has been burdened with a resurgence of domestic terrorism. Following several years of a lull with the wrap-up of the November 17 group, attacks by new groups have sharply increased. On October 27, Greek terrorists opened fire on a police station and fled the scene, wounding six officers, two seriously. An ammonium nitrate car bomb was detonated at the Athens Stock Exchange on September 2 this year, causing significant material damage, and a police officer was murdered in June. The U.S. Embassy suffered an RPG attack in January of 2007. The U.S. has been offering technical assistance and sharing intelligence through DHS, FBI, and other agencies, but the Greeks are woefully unprepared for any significant increase in terrorist activity. We are also concerned that the rise of Greece as a migration path from troubled spots to Western Europe and vice-versa opens the door to international extremists making a foothold here or using Greece as a "safe house" for planning nefarious activities.

¶20. (U) We are very much looking forward to your visit and hosting you here in Athens.
Speckhard